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FM AMEMBASSY TUNIS  
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INFO RUCNMGH/MAGHREB COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TUNIS 000792

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/26/2019  
TAGS: PGOV PHUM KDEM TS  
SUBJECT: BEN ALI, RULING PARTY CLAIM CRUSHING  
(PREDETERMINED) VICTORY AND ASSERT HIGH TURNOUT

REF: A. TUNIS 791  
    B. TUNIS 789  
    C. TUNIS 769 AND PREVIOUS

Classified by Ambassador Gordon Gray for reasons 1.4 (b)  
and (d).

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Summary  
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11. (C) Official election results were announced in the early morning of October 26. As widely expected, President Ben Ali crushed his opponents, with 89 percent of the vote, and the ruling party received the maximum number of seats allowed by this year's voting rules (75 percent). Elections officials claimed an 89 percent turnout, a claim which is clearly at odds with anecdotes and the observations of Embassy officers who visited polling stations in different parts of Tunisia. Tunisian observers took note that Mrs. Ben Ali was seen to be voting before the President on State TV, a sight which, combined her higher media profile in recent months, will likely fuel speculation that she could be preparing the ground to succeed her husband. End summary.

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Official Results  
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12. (U) On the early morning of October 26, the state-owned Tunisian Press Agency (TAP) announced results of the October 25 elections. According to the official statistics:

-- President Ben Ali took 89.62 percent of the 4.73 million votes cast. (In 2004 he took 94.49 percent of the vote.)

-- The ruling Democratic Constitutional Rally (RCD) won 161 seats in the 214-seat legislature (75 percent). In 2004, it had 152 out of 188 seats (80 percent).

-- The official participation rate was 89.45 percent, down from 91.52 percent in 2004.

13. (C) Comment: While no independent statistics were collected, the GOT's assertion that 89.45 percent of the 4.9 million eligible voters turned out does not seem credible. The ten Embassy teams which conducted informal observations in different parts of Tunisia noted nearly empty polling stations, with moderate turnout in a few sites. Feedback from a modest group of EU (unaccredited) diplomatic observers also indicated a low turnout.

14. (C) Comment continued: The speed with which results were announced also raises questions. While participation rates might be fairly quickly calculated, it seems unlikely, if not physically impossible, that election workers could count more than 4 million votes cast at more than 20,000 polling stations and aggregate the results in just over 12 hours after polls closed at 1800 local, October

125. End comment.

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Also Ran...  
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15. (SBU) Of President Ben Ali's "opponents," Mohammed Bouchiha, first cousin of Mrs. Ben Ali, took 5 percent of the vote, according to official figures, up from 3.7 percent in 12004. Ahmed Innoubli, who had endorsed President Ben Ali earlier in 2009 before allegedly being "asked" to run, took 3.94 percent of the vote. Leftist Ahmed Brahim, widely seen as the only independent in the race (in a campaign speech broadcast live on state TV, he harshly criticized the Ben Ali government for corruption and nepotism (ref C)), took 1.62 percent of the vote.

16. (SBU) In parliament, Ahmed Brahim's Tajdid Party slipped from three seats to two (of 214 total), Bouchiha's Popular Unity Party (PUP) went from 11 to 12 seats, the Democratic Socialist Movement (MDS) went from 13 to 16 seats, the Liberal Social Party (PSL) went from two to eight seats and the Green Party for Progress (PVP) went from zero to six seats. (Note: The last three parties, which saw the biggest gains, all endorsed Ben Ali for President. End note.)

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Mrs. Ben Ali Votes First  
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17. (C) Tunisian observers took note that when state TV broadcast footage of President and Mrs. Ben Ali reporting to

TUNIS 00000792 002 OF 002

their local polling station in Carthage, Mrs. Ben Ali, rather than the President, was the first to "work the room" greeting poll workers and the first to cast her ballots in the ballot boxes. Such images, plus a notably higher media profile for Mrs. Ben Ali during the recent campaign (leading political rallies, presiding over charity events, etc.) have fueled speculation that the First Lady has strong political ambitions and may even hope to succeed her husband after his coming five year term.

GRAY